

“NMCB 4 is Virtually Home for the Holidays”

Story by Lt Carl Rhoads

Photos PENDING

FALLUJAH, IRAQ -- For as long as servicemen and women have deployed to foreign shores they and their families have struggled through the challenges of separation. Parents and children often feel the absence most acutely when Mommy or Daddy is unavailable for a holiday.

“This is the first Christmas I’ve spent away from my boys,” explained Construction Mechanic 2nd Class Dawn Ayala, of U.S. Naval Mobile Construction Battalion FOUR (NMCB 4), forward deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II. “I will really miss their excitement and anticipation.”

This year, however, she has a unique opportunity to stay connected to her little ones thanks to an innovative program called United Through Reading (UTR). According to their web site www.read2kids.org, “UTR is an outreach program of the Family Literacy Foundation, a non-profit educational organization whose mission is to facilitate supportive relationships for children through families and friends reading aloud to them. Through this program, military parents can communicate through reading aloud on videotape to their children while separated during long deployments. Furthermore, it serves as a vehicle to continue parenting from thousands of miles away.”

CM2 Ayala jumped at the chance to sit for 30 minutes and read to her children. “I always read to them at bed time when I am home,” she mentioned.

Builder 2nd Class Alejandro Gonzales, of NMCB4, was also an eager participant. “My son is a baby and he loved the first tape. My wife said he actually turned toward the TV when I came on,” said a smiling BU2 Gonzales.

Seabees of NMCB 4, deployed to Southwest Asia and Rota, Spain, fully support this program so that it costs the troops nothing except the time to sit and read. A wide selection of books, video equipment and mailing envelopes are provided. Sending the tape/DVD from the deployment site to the member’s home is also free.

“The kids really liked seeing their mother. They kept trying to get her attention by waving and yelling ‘Mommy!’ as they watched,” said Antonio Ayala after viewing the DVD sent by his wife.

While many troops will be deployed around the world this season, thanks to a little modern technology and a pinch of ingenuity, many can still be ‘virtually’ home for the holidays.

- NMCB FOUR -